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ABSTRACT

The native languages of Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia are reviewed in this brief summary of Indochinese refugee characteristics. General background information on each country is followed by a description of the linguistic diversity of the area and a chart showing the three principal linguistic families: Austroasiatic, Tai, and Sino-Tibetan. A second chart on demography illustrates the influence of both China and India on the area, and the large populations of Hmong and Lao in China and Thailand. Additional information is given on native language scripts, naming systems and forms of address, common names, and some major differences between Indochinese languages and English. (LB)

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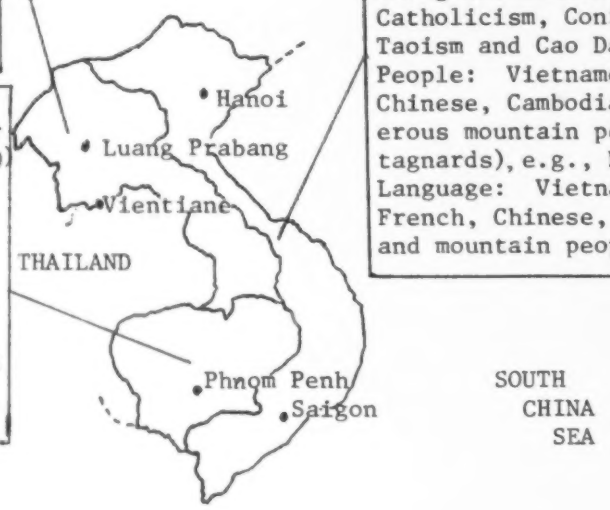
LANGUAGES OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES

A. General Background Information

LAOS
Population: 3,794,000
Area: 91,429 sq. mi.
Government: Communist
Religion: Buddhism, also animism and Christianity
People: Lao; also numerous hill peoples, e. g., Hmong (Meo), Black Thai (Thai Dam), Mien (Yao), Lu, T'in, Khmu
Language: Lao; also French and hill peoples.

CAMBODIA (KAMPUCHEA)
Population: 9,649,000 (other estimates as low as 5,000,000)
Area: 69,898 sq. mi.
Government; Communist
Religion: Buddhism
People: Cambodian (Khmer); also Chinese, Vietnamese and several hill peoples.
Language: Cambodian (Khmer); also French, Chinese, Vietnamese and hill peoples.

VIETNAM
Population: 54,918,000
Area: 128,402 sq. mi.
Government: Communist
Religion: Buddhism; also Catholicism, Confucianism, Taoism and Cao Daism
People: Vietnamese; also Chinese, Cambodian and numerous mountain peoples (montagnards), e.g., Nung and Tho
Language: Vietnamese; also French, Chinese, Cambodian and mountain peoples.



B. Language

1. Linguistic Diversity

Indochina is perhaps the most linguistically diverse region in the world. An astonishing number of distinctly different languages are spoken by the peoples of this area. It is not uncommon for an inhabitant of Indochina to speak not only his own mother-tongue, but also the national language, if different from his native tongue, and French or, more recently, English as well. It is most difficult for primarily monolingual Americans to imagine such linguistic complexity. The following chart classifies the main languages spoken by Indochinese refugees in the U.S. under three principal linguistic families:

AUSTROASIATIC	TAI	SINO-TIBETAN
VIET: VIETNAMESE MON-KHMER: Khmer (Cambodian), T'in, Khmu	TAI: Lao, Black Thai (Thai Dam) Nung, Tho, Lu	MEO-YAO: Hmong (Meo, Miao), Mien(Yao, Man) SINITIC: Chinese (Mandarin or Kuo Yu, Cantonese, Teochiu, Hokkien, Hainanese, Hakka)

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2. Demographic Background

In the following chart note 1) the influence of both China and India on different regions of Indochina and 2) the large populations of Hmong and Lao in China and Thailand, respectively. Although various dialects and sub-dialects exist for all five language groups, only in the case of the Chinese dialects is communication seriously impeded by these dialectical differences.

Language	Evolution	Population of Native Speakers	Dialects
Chinese (Vietnam)	Indigenous to China	2,000,000 (Vietnam)	Mandarin (Kuo Yu), Cantonese, Teochiu, Hokkien, Hainanese, Hakka
Cambodian	Influenced by Pali-Sanskrit (India)	7,700,000	Various regional sub-dialects.
Hmong (Laos)	Influenced by Chinese	350,000 (Laos) 3,900,000 (China)	Blue/Green Hmong and White Hmong sub-dialects.
Lao	Influenced by Pali-Sanskrit (India)	1,600,000 (Laos) 9,000,000 (Thailand)	Various regional sub-dialects, e.g., Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Pakse, etc.
Vietnamese	Influenced by Chinese	48,000,000	Northern, Central and Southern sub-dialects.

3. Script

The five languages represented on the next page are all mutually unintelligible. With the exception of Cambodian, all of these languages are tonal. This means, for example, that ma pronounced with six different pitch levels may have six different meanings.

The Vietnamese language uses Roman script; therefore, Vietnamese names do not have to be transliterated into English. Since the 1950's, the Hmong language has also been written in Roman Script using a system, devised by missionaries, called the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA). But Hmong names written in the RPA, e.g., Yaj Tub Ntxawg, are nearly impossible to decipher for Americans. To avoid confusion, Hmong refugees transliterate their names into English as do the Chinese, Cambodians and Lao, whose languages do not use Roman script (see chart on next page).

Attempting to pronounce Indochinese names, even when they are written in

Roman script, can prove trying for many Americans because the symbol-sound correspondence is different from that of English. Vang Pao sounds more like Va Paw and Vo My Dung is pronounced Vaw Me Zoong. It is not surprising, then, that in many cases there may be more than one way to transliterate a name, e.g., Somsy, Somsi or Somsee. The important point to remember here is that the pronunciation of a name in the native language must take precedence over the way it is written in Roman script.

	Native Script	
Language	Name in Native Alphabet	Transliteration
Cambodian	ប៉ុក ប៊ូរិន	Pok Borin
Chinese (Vietnam)	林 宝 明	Lam Bao Minh
Hmong (Laos	Yaj Tub Ntxawg	Yang Tou Geu
Lao	ສົມພອນ ທັມວົງສາ	Somphone Thammavongsa
Vietnamese	Nguyễn Văn Giao	Nguyen Van Giao

4. Naming Systems and Forms of Address

The naming systems employed by the various peoples of Indochina are confusing for most Americans. The following charts should help you determine 1) which is the given name and which is the family name and 2) given the name, what is the ethnic background.

In comparing the charts directly above and below, it becomes evident that only the Lao language is similar to English in that the given name precedes the family name. In the four other Indochinese languages listed, the family name comes first. However, it should be noted that many Indochinese arrive in the U.S. with their names already "Westernized". It is best to ask the refugee himself for clarification of given and family names.

	Name Order			
Language	Honorary or Diminutive	Family	Middle	Given
Cambodian		Pok		Borin
Chinese		Lam	Bao	Minh
Hmong	Tou	Yang		Geu
Lao		Thammavongsa		Somphone
Vietnamese		Nguyen	Van	Giao

Sometimes Hmong children are called by their given name preceded by a diminutive, such as Tou for boys and Mai for girls. Geu then becomes Tou Geu (see chart on previous page) and Doua becomes Mai Doua.

It is also customary in the Hmong culture for a man, upon starting a family, to be given an honorary name such as Boua. From then on he is known as Boua plus his given name, e.g., Ge becomes Boua Ge.

The middle names Van and Thi indicate male and female, respectively, in the Vietnamese language.

Cambodian, Chinese, Hmong and Vietnamese women customarily continue to use their maiden names after marriage.

In Indochinese languages, excluding Chinese, a title such as Mr. is used with the given name, not, as is the American custom, with the family name. For example, Cambodians would call Pok Borin, Mr. Borin, while Americans would refer to him as Mr. Pok (see chart on previous page).

When addressing another person, most Indochinese use terms such as older brother or sister, younger brother or sister, aunt, uncle, grandmother, grandfather, etc. rather than given names. Kinship terms are used even to address a stranger. Often a kinship term will precede the person's abbreviated given name, e.g., Bounphet would be called Ai Phet (older brother Phet) by his younger siblings, relatives, friends and acquaintances alike.

Cambodian, Chinese and Lao people have a greater variety of family names than do the Hmong and Vietnamese. Most Hmong and Vietnamese refugees will have one of the family names listed in the following chart. The family names Yang, Xiong and Vang comprise a majority of the Hmong. As many as 45% of the Vietnamese have the family name Nguyen; Tran and Le are also very common.

Common Names (Given in Native Name Order)

Cambodian	Chinese(Vietnam)	Hmong (Laos)	Lao	Vietnamese
Pok Borin	Lam Bao Minh	Yang Tou Geu	Somphone Thammavongsa	Nguyen Van Giao
Chan Sok	Vuong Chi Cuong	Xiong Mai Doua	Khamsing Chanthalangsy	Tran Thi Xuan
Tep Nary	Ly Hong Phat	Thao Boua Ge	Boun[illegible]het Sengsopha	Le Kim Anh
Pen Saman	Quach Chau	Vang Chue	Thongsavanh Mahaxay	Huynh Thi Tuyet Nga
Som Nouan	Luu Binh	Heu Kou	Phonekeo Phouthavong	Truong Quang Hung
Prom Sok	Trieu Mon Trang	Lee Dia	Chanhkham Luangaphay	Vo My Dung
Khim Rumduol	Luong Quay	Vue Mao	Bouabane Sivongsa	Pham Duc Kien
Chhom Phon	La Phuoc Tiep	Moua Pa	Sengchanh Keomanyvong	Dang Thi Huong
Chea Koun	To Long Than	Lo Chou	Vanthong Phansavath	Ngo Trung Hieu
Kem Chum	Ho Thich	Chang Bee	Sysouvanh Xayarath	Do Ngoc Lam
Sam Serei	Chau Huy	Fang Blia	Phoxay Vansirivong	Hoang Thien Tam
Kong Kea	Hua Buu Muoi	Kong Nhia	Chitpasong Dittavong	Bui Viet Chuyen
Samreth Pech	Trach Thien	Phang Ka Ying	Somsanouk Xaykosy	Phan Thi Thanh Minh
Men Bora	Ma Xao	Kue Neng	Phengsy Douangphayvong	Vu Dang Nghia
Chhim Mara	Giang Han	Hang You	Sisouk Insisiengmay	Duong Thi Phuong Mai

Note: The Chinese and Vietnamese family names listed above are by no means mutually exclusive, e.g., many ethnic Chinese have the surnames Tran, Duong, etc., while on the other hand there are Vietnamese with the family names Vuong, Ly, etc.

5. Some Major Differences Between Indochinese Languages and English

A few general remarks should be made about the languages represented in the above charts:

1) Many consonant sounds, e.g.,-b,-d,-f,-g,-dj,-l,-r,-s,-v,-ks, and-z may not occur in final position. Even when p,t and k do occur in final position, they are often unaspirated and, therefore, barely audible to the American ear. Excepting the ng sound, the Hmong language has no consonant sounds occuring in final position.

2) Consonant cluster (blend) sounds do not occur in final position; e.g., in words such as act, church, third, wealth, fist, six.

3) Verbs do not change form; e.g., eat (eats), ate, eaten, eating.

4) No articles occur; e.g., a, an, and the.

5) Plural endings on nouns do not occur; e.g., two persons.

6) Possessive endings do not occur; e.g., John's book.

7) No common usage of prefixes or suffixes occurs; e.g., unfold or happiness.

8) No infinitives occur; e.g., to hear.

9) No distinction is made between subjective, objective and possessive pronouns; e.g., I, me and my. The same word is used for all three cases; e.g., "I go", "They like I" and "Book of I".

10) Word order may be different; modifiers and classfiers may follow the words they modify; e.g., "I have bread white three loaves" or "I have three loaves bread white".

11) Predicate adjectives do not require the use of the verb "to be"; e.g., "The house is beautiful" translates as "house beautiful".

12) No subject - auxiliary verb inversion occurs in negative statements; e.g., "Bill does not know" translates as "Bill not know".

13) Negative interrogative statements are confusing; e.g., "Don't you like it?" might be answered "Yes, I don't like it".

14) No subject - auxiliary verb inversion occurs in interrogative statements; e.g., "Does Jim work here?" translates as "Jim work here + a question particle".

In highlighting some of the primary differences between Indochinese languages and English, the major sources of difficulty for Indochinese refugees learning to speak English become immediately apparent.

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